



# DISABILITY ETIQUETTE

a pocket guide for North Dakota Business & Employers



With over \$220 of billion discretionary spending power nationally, individuals with disabilities represent a significant part of our country and state economy. They represent a market segment that is twice that of the highly sought-after teen segment, and it is one that continues to grow.

Nationally, there are an estimated 54 million Americans with disabilities. In North Dakota, the number is roughly 125,000. That means nearly one-in-five of our fellow citizens have a disability. Equally important, is that one-in-three families have a family member with permanent injury, illness or impairment.

Over half of Americans, 65 years of age or older, have a disability and that number is expected to double by the year 2030. In North Dakota, this represents an increasing percentage of our state's population.

So why are North Dakota businesses and employers so reluctant to tap into this economic and labor pool? The answer probably lies in misperceptions, fear, and a lack of information.

*A Pocket Guide For North Dakota Business And Employers: Disability Etiquette* is a simple introduction to etiquette that will aid you and your staff in effectively interacting with and marketing to individuals with disabilities.

Whether used with fellow employees or patrons, the easy-to-use guide represents an ideal way of building an effective personal and business relationship with an ever-increasing portion of our population.

Once you have reviewed this guide, you will realize that building a broader understanding of disability issues and etiquette will have a powerful impact on your business and community.

## Ten Quick Tips

To get you started, let's take a look at "10 Quick Tips" on disability etiquette.

### 1. Be yourself.

Remember the person with a disability is often sensitive to your comfort in the situation.

### 2. Use common sense.

People with disabilities want to be treated the same as anyone else.

### 3. Don't put unnecessary pressure on yourself to know and to do everything "right."

Be patient with yourself in learning what the specific needs of the person are. Don't be embarrassed if you do or say the wrong thing.

### 4. Be considerate and patient.

Anticipate what the person's needs might be and offer assistance when possible. Be patient if the person requires more time to communicate, to walk, or to accomplish various tasks.

### 5. Don't be afraid to offer assistance.

Ask first if the individual looks like they could use assistance. Don't automatically give help unless the person clearly needs or has asked for it.

### 6. Communicate with the person, not his or her interpreter, companion or assistant.

### 7. Respect the person's privacy.

Refrain from asking questions which would otherwise be inappropriate to ask of any other person.

### 8. Be sensitive to their needs.

Individuals with disabilities are more independent than what most people think. It is often more frustrating to communicate with persons who are not sensitive to their needs than it is to maneuver through accessibility barriers.

### 9. Don't be patronizing.

Show the person the same respect that you expect to receive from others.

### 10. Individuals with disabilities have dreams, hopes and desires like you.

By working together, we can make them come true.



## Blind or Visually Impairment

Introduce yourself and identify who you are (Hi! My name is John and I'm your waiter today.) Give the person verbal information that is visually obvious to those who can see.

Be descriptive when giving directions. Saying "Step up here," has little meaning to someone who can't see you point. "Three steps forward, then two steps up," would be much more helpful.

Lead someone who is blind only after they have accepted your offer to do so. Touch their arm, then offer your arm to guide them. Allow them to hold your arm rather than holding theirs. It is important to let them control their own movements.

Verbally describe the area as you go.

Describe things from their perspective, not yours. Some persons who are blind use a "clock" reference for things directly in front of them (an obstacle in their path). For example, a clothing rack at 10 o'clock. Before using this method, ask the person if it is useful to them.

Face the person with a visual impairment when talking. If your eyes are directed towards them, your voice will be as well.

Make sure that aisles are clear of obstacles.

Inform person of changes in floor conditions, like wet floors.

Count out loud when returning change.

*Don't interact with a guide dog while it is working.*

*Don't use references that are visually oriented like, "The item you want is over there."*





## Deaf and/or Hearing Impairment

Find out how the person best communicates.

If the person reads lips, speak in a normal tone. Short, simple sentences are best. Avoid blocking their view of your face.

To get their attention, tap their shoulder or wave your hand – but not in an exaggerated manner – in front of them.

If there is some doubt whether they understood you correctly, ask them! If they did not understand, rephrase your statement. When someone asks, “What did you say?” the answers, “Never mind,” “Nothing,” or “It’s not important,” are very common replies. These are insulting and demeaning because they communicate that the person is not worth repeating yourself for.

*Don’t become impatient or frustrated with the person if it takes longer to communicate.*

*If the person is using hearing aids, try to avoid conversations in large, open and noisy areas.*

## Difficulty with Speech

NOTE: Many people with difficulty in speech find themselves in situations where people treat them as if they are drunk, mentally impaired, or mentally ill. They are accustomed to being avoided, ignored, even being hung up on on the phone.

Accessibility for persons with difficulty in speech lies within your power. Your understanding, patience and communication skills are as important to someone with speech that is difficult to understand as a ramp is to someone who uses a wheelchair.

If you do not understand what the person is saying, bring it to their attention immediately and ask how the two of you may better communicate.

If it is a stressful situation, stay calm. If you are in a public area with many distractions, consider moving to a quiet or private location.

Consider writing as an alternative means of communication.

If no solution to the communication problem can be worked out with you and the person, consider asking if there is someone who can interpret what they are saying.

*Don’t pretend to understand them when you really don’t.*

*Don’t interrupt. Wait for sentences to be completed.*

*Don’t become impatient or frustrated with the communication.*

*Don’t finish people’s sentences for them.*

## Individuals Using a Wheelchair

When you handle someone's wheelchair, treat it with the same respect you would if you were holding someone's eyeglasses. They are similar in many ways...they can break, they are difficult to have repaired in short notice and on weekends; and it is extremely difficult for the person when the chair is out of commission.

When speaking to someone who uses a wheelchair, try to speak at the same level in which they are sitting. Having to look straight up is uncomfortable.

When helping a person down a step, ask them which way they prefer it to be done for them to feel secure.

*Don't assume a person using a wheelchair needs assistance. Ask them if they need assistance first.*

*Don't start pushing someone who uses a wheelchair without asking first.*

*Don't push open a door using the person's feet or foot pedals.*

*Don't stand too close to the person in the wheelchair when communicating. Give them some space.*

## Developmental Disability

NOTE: A developmental disability is a condition that arises in infancy or childhood. It can be caused from a serious head injury. This disability can cause problems in language, learning, mobility, and capacity for independent living.

Speak in concrete terms, use short sentences and avoid abstract instructions.

Complete one step of instructions at a time before instructions for the next step are given.

Demonstrate how things should be done. Explain what you are doing as you do it.

Give extra time to complete a task.

Speak in a normal voice. If you have difficulty in communicating, ask attendant for better ways to communicate effectively.

Based on level of disability, individual may not be able to ask attendant for better ways to communicate effectively.

Based on level of disability, individual may not be able to ask for personal assistance or follow directions. Look for behavior or body language clues to anticipate individual needs.

*Don't become impatient if the individual does not understand the direction given.*

*Don't get defensive. Bluntness may be a part of the person's natural way of communication.*

*Don't use terms that describe level of disability.*





Now that you have some good working suggestions on disability etiquette, we need to turn your attention to one more area...how we say certain things. Improper phrasing can hurt and offend an individual with a disability. Here are a few “Do’s and Don’ts.”

Use: People with disabilities.  
*Don’t Use: The handicapped or disabled.*

Use: People with mental retardation; He has a cognitive impairment.  
*Don’t Use: The mentally retarded, or he/she is retarded*

Use: He/She has Down Syndrome.  
*Don’t Use: He/She is a Down’s kid, or she’s a mongoloid.*

Use: He/She has a learning disability.  
*Don’t Use: He/She is learning disabled.*

Use: He/She has paraplegia.  
*Don’t Use: He/She is a parapalegic.*

Use: He/She has a physical disability; She has mobility impairment.  
*Don’t Use: He/She is crippled.*

Use: He/She is short of stature.  
*Don’t Use: He/She is a dwarf; He/She is a midget.*

Use: He/She has an emotional disability.  
*Don’t Use: He/She is emotionally disturbed.*

Use: He/She uses a wheelchair.  
*Don’t Use: He/She is wheelchair bound; He/She is confined to a wheelchair.*

Use: A typical person or a person without a disability.  
*Don’t Use: A normal or healthy individual.*

Use: He/She receives special education services.  
*Don’t Use: He/She is in special education.*

Use: He/She has a need for...  
*Don’t Use: He/She has a problem with...*

Use: Congenital disability.  
*Don’t Use: Birth defect*

Use: Accessible parking, bathrooms, etc.  
*Don’t Use: Handicapped parking, bathrooms, etc.*

Don’t refer to a person’s disability unless it is relevant...  
*REMEMBER, people are people first, disability second!*

Don’t use the word “handicap” to refer to a person’s disability.

Avoid negative or sensational descriptions of a person’s disability.

Don’t use “normal” to describe people without disabilities; instead say people without disabilities or typical, if comparisons are necessary.

Never assume that a person with a communication disorder also has a cognitive disability such as mental retardation.

Don’t portray people with disabilities as overly courageous, brave, special, or super human.

To obtain more  
information on  
disability-related  
issues, or to learn  
more about the  
services RCS offers  
North Dakota  
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Williston  
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